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TURNING ON THE JAPANESE--THROUGH MUSIC

Japan Travel Bureau (JTB) says Discover Japan. Hugh Leonard (SS.CC) says Discover Life.

Father Leonard, a Catholic missionary-priest in Ibaraki-ken, is discovering a lot about both Japan and life these days as he tunes into Japanese young people and tries to turn them on--through music.

Discover Life in Songs is an extremely well-designed 240-page collection of popular American and Japanese music, from folk to rock, that is copyrighted and in its second printing. It is written primarily in Japanese. Father Leonard is the moving force behind the book which may be one of the least ostentatious-and one of the most seriously fun--approaches to mission ever tried in Japan by Catholics or Protestants.

The collection of Western songs range from Joan Baez and Pete Seeger to Paul Simon and Cat Stevens and are interspersed with Japanese Snoopy cartoons. Initially written for use by Japanese church young adult groups, the book and its accompanying stereo tapes are divided under 10 "themes": music, love, peace, loneliness, friendship, person, freedom, youth, religion and life.

Nearly 2000 copies of the book are now in circulation, so far mostly among Catholics who are using the songs for everything from English teaching to Catechetical classes. For this latter purpose, Father Leonard has written and published supplementary materials about "music as a medium of discovery".

"In the narrow sense," he says, "catechesis is based on a religious system of truths, duties and practices. In the broader sense--the sense that I'm trying to instill--it is based on immanence, experience, personalism and growth.

"Any catechesis has to do with the revelation of God, but here the emphasis is on an immanent God. He teaches man about Himself from within, through the ordinary and extraordinary experience of life. Although this may not be a familiar way of speaking about revelation, it has precedents in the Old Testament.

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Subscriptions: JAPAN ¥1,500; OVERSEAS Airmail \$ 8.00, Seemail \$ 6.00

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"Discover Life deals with the experience of the present world and its meaning for men. The catechetical function is to evoke and interpret the design of God for men. The purpose is to make youth aware of what is going on within themselves and their world and try to draw them to a response. There are signs of God's revelation everywhere, but this activity tries to use those signs whose signification is familiar to the listeners," he says.

Father Leonard believes that "the vocation of every man and woman in God's plan is to become a person" and he believes that songs are especially useful in highlighting this process of becoming.

Is this merely a Western music buff's attempts to impose some form of "becoming" on young Japanese who think quite differently? Not if you've ever heard what kind of music is played in the most popular young people's coffee shops, or ever watched the lines in Japanese record stores. Likewise, the response to Father Leonard's song collection has been enthusiastic. He offers some observations on this:

"For the Japanese there is a heavy dependence on the intuition of truth, goodness and beauty. They are esthetically oriented with a heavy dependence on the emotional and sentimental, even when discussing deep topics. They prefer to deal with 'religious experience', to discover the immanent spirit, rather than to deal with verbal expressions or to do intellectual exercises. The Japanese like to sense the mysterious and feel the wholeness of things, and this music helps open the door. In addition, when this music is shared in small groups, the shared, intuitive perceptions become powerful motives for action," says Father Leonard.

He believes that Japanese young people are "really being short-changed today" by a society and an educational system that "tries to force people onto the GNP-productivity tract. There's a feeling, a sense in young people of being lost, of having a spiritual void. Yet, more so than even five years ago, these people are more confident--they have fewer inhibitions about talking over these feelings."

"This is where we come in--not to proselytize but to search life's possibilities, with the hope that when the consciousness of these people is awakened to certain values, they will themselves begin to ask the right questions," he says.

Father Leonard's idea sprang from a folk song group he organized in Yonezawa three years ago. The 35 participants loved the gatherings but eventually voiced one complaint: they wanted to discuss some of the themes in the songs. Ever since, Father Leonard has addressed himself to that complaint--and has never regretted it. Presently he has 25 non-Christians meeting two hours each week to listen to the tapes and talk. But recently he's had to deal with another complaint: that two hours is never long enough. To which Father Leonard responds, "Thanks be to God for small mercies."

A limited number of the song collections are available at cost (¥1000 each) from Father Hugh Leonard, Catholic Mission, 10-6 Kaminecho 2-chome, Hitachi, Ibaraki-ken 317. The minimum requirement is what you dig popular music--and might want to turn on some Japanese young people, with or without guitars. Information about the stereo tapes and their cost can also be directed to the above address.

And as Carole King sings on page 94, "It's gonna come, it's gonna come to you."

Reactions ranged from shouts of agreement and sympathetic tears to shock at cold, hard facts when 600 Christians gathered in Tokyo August 4 to appeal for human rights for Koreans.

Sponsoring organizations, from Catholic through Korean Christian Church in Japan to Non-Church (Mukyokai), came together behind a statement of concern for rights of Koreans both in south Korea and in Japan. It was the first time in Japan for such a widely diversified group of Christians to take action. A simultaneous meeting was held by some 20 American missionaries in Nagano-ken.

Speakers at the bi-lingual (Japanese-Korean) meeting bore heavily on Japan's responsibility --- both past and present --- for the problems facing south Korea today. In the statement of concern released at the meeting, participants argued "it is the Japanese government and the financial world who are supporting the oppressive south Korean regime." Japanese businesses have a vested interest in maintaining the present government of the Republic of Korea (ROK), they suggested, pointing to present low wages in the south and ROK policies which forbid strikes and hamper union organization.

Participants decried present forms of economic cooperation between Japan and Korea, which they said obstruct true economic self-reliance. Korea's much-vaunted annual growth rate of nearly 10 per cent comes almost entirely from import-export deals dependent on foreign investment, noted one participant.

Raw materials are imported by Korea, processed through Japanese companies using cheap Korean labor, and exported for use elsewhere, he said. Profits go to Japanese industry and powerful figures in the Park government; the inexpensive textiles and electronic components go to developed nations. The country's resources remain undeveloped; Koreans are left with little more than the pollution these new industries leave in their wake.

Farm production shows little growth, he continued, and goods and services which would make the lives of the working people easier remain in short supply. Purchasing power among workers has increased only marginally during the years of economic expansion. Employees in the big new factories still cannot afford the goods they produce.

The group appealed to the ROK government to "guarantee basic human rights and freedom of expression". They also called for the release of political prisoners including several Christian leaders and poet Kim Chi Ha.

They urged the Japanese government to end its "new colonialism" of economic expansion into Asia and to reexamine its support of the Park government. By supporting an oppressive regime while exploiting Korean workers, Japan contributes to the "political, economic and cultural subordination" of Korea, they said.

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JCAN READERS: We need your help! What kind of articles would you like to see in future issues of JCAN? At a recent meeting of our new editorial board, some questions were raised about the predominance of "political and social-action related stories" in JCAN, and whether or not we should try to give more exposure to other types of Japanese church news. What's your opinion? Does JCAN fill an information gap for you --- or would you prefer a different emphasis? All suggestions and criticisms will be welcomed and discussed at our staff meetings. So let us hear from you; you'll be playing a big part in the future direction of this magazine.

--- the editors

Japan's attitudes towards Koreans within its own borders also drew sharp criticism. Koreans make up nearly 90 per cent of Japan's total foreign population; nearly three-fourths of these people are descendants of "involuntary immigrants" who under economic, political and military pressure in colonial Korea, came to work in Japanese mines and munitions plants before the war. Although born and raised in Japan, educated in Japanese schools and speaking Japanese as their native language, these descendants are not considered citizens. They live in Japan on the same basis as other aliens, and are subject to deportation.

Before the war Koreans in Japan maintained their own schools where children learned the Korean language and their country's history; however after Japan's defeat Occupation authorities and the Japanese government began a process of assimilation, closing many of the schools so that today about 80 per cent of Korean children in Japan attend Japanese public schools. Here they speak only Japanese and learn a one-sided story of Japan's historical relations with Korea --- the same education that every Japanese child gets.

However, on leaving school they meet strong overt and covert discrimination. Job openings are limited to small businesses and the service trades; over 60 per cent of the Korean labor force in Japan today work as day laborers or are unemployed. This phenomenon of "not-Korean, not-Japanese" was labeled "an assimilation-discrimination policy" by participants at the meeting. Japanese citizens were challenged to change the "reality of ignorance and indifference" towards Korean problems in Japan; speakers called specifically for support of Chon Suk Park in his fight for equal employment opportunities at Hitachi Company. (See JCAN #457, July 12, 1974)

Sponsors also reaffirmed their opposition to the Yasukuni Shrine Bill and related movements, saying these "nullify Japan's democracy and threaten peace in Asia." (JCAN #453, May 3, 1974)

In Ha Lee, Moderator of the Korean Christian Church in Japan, underscored the need for worldwide Christian support of Korean Christians in their struggle for freedom to express their beliefs. If Japanese Christians had not been so totally cut off from other Christians around the world, they might have continued their resistance to rising Japanese militarism in the 1930s, he suggested.

Mikio Sumiya, a professor of economics at Tokyo University who recently returned from travelling in Korea, illustrated present-day attitudes there. Not many years ago, south Korea suffered a poor rice harvest and Japan sent surplus rice to help alleviate the shortage. Immediately, Sumiya said, a rumor circulated --- generally accepted by the Korean poor --- that the rice from Japan was polluted and had been offered because it was no longer fit for Japanese to eat. Whether true or not it shows the depth of Korean distrust and hatred towards Japan, fostered under Japanese colonialization and fueled recently by Japanese economic advances in Korea (totalling \$295 million invested in 1973 alone). Such distrust will take many years and much work to overcome, he said.

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Following the meeting 400 participants marched peacefully through downtown Tokyo. The 2-hour march, aimed at drawing public attention to the problems faced by Koreans today, ended at Hibiya Park.

The following day a delegation of eight church leaders went to the south Korean Embassy where they met with the ambassador and presented a statement of the meeting's goals and desires. They urged a stronger guarantee of human rights in south Korea and release of those now undergoing military trials.

A strong desire for financial independence dominated the recent General Assembly of the Japan Baptist Convention. The group met to discuss finances and mission activities over the next three-year period.

Convinced that financial independence bears strongly on an independent mission policy, the assembly decided to gradually reduce their reliance on funds from the Southern Baptist Convention in the U.S.A. The goal is complete financial self-sufficiency by 1977.

Representatives of 131 Japanese churches attended the assembly, held at Amagi-san-so July 24-26.

Over 55 per cent of this year's budget came from overseas. The assembly plans a gradual reduction of the overseas contribution to zero over the next three years. The deficit will be made up by increased donations from member churches in Japan and by cutting corners and decreasing the number of paid assembly personnel.

Other plans include self-support of the Seinan Gakuin Theological Seminary and the establishment of a permanent assembly fund.

Under the motto "Self-support and Cooperation" --- Jiritsu to Kyoryoku --- member churches adopted exchange and training programs for lay people and agreed to support infant churches.

The assembly reaffirmed its continuing opposition to nationalization of Yasukuni Shrine. Members see church efforts to defeat this legislation as part of their struggle for world peace.

A resolution expressing solidarity with Christians struggling for democracy in Korea was narrowly defeated. Many members refrained from voting, fearing that any statement by the assembly might cause trouble for Baptists in Korea.

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HIROSHIMA DAY: PRAYERS FOR WORLD PEACE

Although most Japanese attention on Hiroshima Day (August 6) was focussed on the large city-sponsored ceremony in Peace Park, Japanese Christians were active in a number of memorial services featuring prayers for world peace.

In preparation for Hiroshima Day, the Hiroshima YWCA held a service on August 4 beside a grassy mound where bones of unknown atomic victims are interred. On the morning of August 6, 100 persons connected with Hiroshima Jo Gakuin held a memorial service for those killed in the 1945 blast. That evening, the pastor of a local Korean church led students and friends of the World Friendship Center in a short service. Afterwards, lanterns were set afloat in the river, symbolically carrying their peace prayers to the ends of the earth. Missionary Mary McMillan was active in each of the services.

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JAPANESE ANXIETY OVER NIXON'S RESIGNATION - "Poor Nixon!" "Able man, but too much. Too much is as bad as too little." "The fact that sincerity was the issue shows American democracy is sound and healthy." These Japanese reactions reveal that people here are once again aware of their lack of understanding about the United States. And they are anxious.

One of the points the Japanese cannot understand is the undeniable fact that it was American democratic politics --- which had earlier elected Nixon president --- that brought about his resignation. To the average Japanese, this is an American contradiction: on one hand the spectacular, festive election campaign, on the other, deadly serious debate in the House Judiciary Committee. How can these opposites be housed together within American politics?

Many Japanese have high esteem for the strong, stable dynamism of American democracy. Japanese democracy is not mature enough, they say, to take the same action even if a similar incident should occur in Japan. Others feel that US democracy has reached the peak of its maturity with this incident and that the future will see its dissolution.

Although it is reported that President Ford has warned against isolationism, saying it would bring a tragic downfall, many Japanese feel this administration will concentrate on internal affairs and neglect its international role. Some Japanese fear that as a result drastic changes may take place in the present three-pole power structure of the US, the USSR and China.

Japanese feeling at this point might be called "ambiguous anxiety."

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PEN CLUB CONTROVERSY - The Japan PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) Club has become embroiled in a controversy involving south Korean poet Kim Chi Ha which is threatening to split the club down the middle.

The club dispatched two of its members to Seoul in early August to investigate the situation surrounding Kim's July death sentence (since commuted to life imprisonment at hard labor) at the hands of a special south Korean military court. When the two club members reported that Kim's sentence was purely for political activity and implied that it had nothing to do with his free speech as a poet, other club members severely protested these conclusions by resigning from the club.

Although the club's board of directors denied official responsibility for the two members' "personal observations", five of the directors also threatened to resign from the club because the two, in their eyes, had gone to Korea and reported their conclusions as official PEN club representatives. The board has decided to wait until September before taking further action on the matter.

This is not the first time a split of opinion within the club has led to withdrawal of large numbers of members. Apparently for many Japanese literary figures, the club is losing its meaning.

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